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ABSTRACT

The focus of this journal edition is remedial writing instruction in high school and college. Articles in the journal are: "The Remedial Student is Different," by Karl K. Taylor; "Writing Apprehension: (I) Combating Fear of Failure," by Donna K. Gorrell; "Writing Apprehension: (II) Where Does Fear of Writing Come From?," by Charles R. Duke; "One Day in the Life of a Remedial Composition Teacher," by Tori Haring-Smith; "Homework Helpers: An Alternative Approach," by Leon Gersten; "Using Writing Errors as Diagnostic Tools," by Mary Moore; "Building on Intuitions: Encouraging Sentence Sense," by Regina Rinderer; and "When Remedial Writing Is Not Remedial Writing: Preparing the Specially Admitted Student for College-Level English," by Jim Burns. (RM)

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Remedial English

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The Remedial Student Is Different

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After spending some ten years at home raising the children, my wife decided to return to college and take a course in accounting. As we were discussing the classes and instructors available, I pointed out that she should take Accounting 110, the first transfer-level course in that curriculum. Somewhat skeptical of her skills and of the time available to study, she decided on Accounting 105 which is a remedial course, more difficult than high school book-keeping, but supposedly not as complex as the transfer-level class. Although I questioned her decision, I didn't try to discourage her from enrolling. However, as the course progressed, I kept asking her how the remedial class differed from the transfer course. After discussing that question with the teacher, my wife explained the distinction quite simply: "In the remedial class, we cover the first 15 chapters of the book, and in the next class, we cover the last 15 chapters." I was truly amazed. Is genuine remediation the process of breaking a relatively sophisticated skill or task into smaller pieces and teaching the same material at a slower pace? If I'm not mistaken, that appears to be the notion of Jerome Bruner, and it is quite similar to Benjamin Bloom's mastery learning. According to them, education is the process of breaking the subject down into short, manageable segments, and providing lots and lots of practice. However, this segment kind of teaching seems to run somewhat counter to the work of Piaget, who says that the learning of a skill is affected by a person's perceptual and cognitive development, a matter which I will discuss later.

Let's say that we want to teach a weak student how to write. The student's first writing sample indicates these problems: logical but not illiterate sentence fragments; dangling or misplaced modifiers; and an abundance of comma splices. In addition, we find an almost total lack of organization. If we were to follow the theories of Bloom and Bruner, an appropriate form of remediation would be to break our instruction down into small segments so the student

can understand and overcome his problem. Accordingly, we would assign three appropriate exercises in our handy *Harbace Handbook*. And instead of asking him to write 500 word themes, we might suggest writing correct sentences or short paragraphs. These practices are logical; they are used widely; and much of the time they fail miserably. Many of the students leaving remedial courses write no better than when they arrived — despite their hard work and our best intentions.

Why? To answer that question, I'd like to tell a story. My neighbor, Ralph, has been having problems with his lawn. For the last 25 years or so, a spot of grass about the size of a bushel basket turns brown and dies in his backyard. This browning occurs in July when the weather turns hot and when rainfall diminishes. Until last year, Ralph's only solution to the problem was to water that spot heavily to keep it green. Last summer, when he retired and had a little more time, I saw Ralph in the backyard digging away at that spot of grass. So I went over to see him, and together we tried to solve the mystery of the brown grass. Much to our surprise, almost a foot below the surface, we found a chunk of concrete about the size of a bushel basket. After we removed that object and filled the hole with dirt, Ralph never had to water that spot again.

In the teaching of remedial English, I think we have been watering the grass for too long; we have been treating symptoms or effects rather than real causes. Some of us, discouraged with previous efforts, have begun to dig deeper into the problem. By no means do we have all the solutions, but we at least realize that the problem is considerably more complicated than we once thought. And we can say, with little reservation, that the remedial student is different.

How "different"? Why can't we use the segment-approach to writing and achieve success? To answer this question, I will go back to 1972, when the Dean of Instruction at Illinois Central College at East Peoria, Illinois asked me to become the coordinator of our Developmental Program. During the first year, I tried nothing terribly different because I wanted to test the approach used by my colleagues and learn as much as I could about the students and their problems. As might be expected, in the writing classes much attention was being placed on grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Nothing longer than a paragraph was ever written. I guess my three major discoveries were that grammar study did not carry over into my students' writing, that they wrote incredibly short sentences with little variety in construction, and that over half of my class did not know their left hand from their right. I will never

forget racing back to my chairman to ask what it means when an adult can't distinguish his left from his right hand. He didn't know, but the discovery stimulated us to begin reading and thinking.

At that time, I assumed teaching grammar was as far back into language instruction as one could go. Thus, writing instruction should begin with grammar because correct writing depended on knowledge of grammar. By this, I mean the ability to identify the parts of speech, or to point out participial phrases, nominative absolutes, subordinate clauses, and the like. Although I had heard teachers encourage students to write as they talk, I didn't see any direct, measurable relationship between writing and speaking and listening. And more important, I assumed that organizing a paper had no real roots or subskills; therefore, teaching a student to organize a theme should begin with organizing something written like a paragraph. In short, I knew that writing was rather like a branch on a tree. Obviously in my mind the tree represented all of language development — listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing was only one small limb, but I was unable to see where the limb was connected to the trunk. More important, I couldn't see the roots of language development beneath the surface of the ground.

I now view my student's problems in a new light because I have discovered, through reading and research, many of the subskills on which writing instruction is based. For example, I now believe one uses correct grammar because he has heard and read edited American English. If he has not heard or read edited American English, he will not write correctly — or he will do so with great difficulty. And our typical formal instruction will have little effect on his written language which has been influenced by what he has heard. And if his writing does sound like the way he talks, it will be terrible; I know now that the student has not read enough to realize the difference between oral and written language. Thus, what I am trying to say can perhaps be best explained with an analogy. Let's assume that we have a child who cannot multiply 55 by 55. After observing the situation, we discover that the child multiplies the figures correctly, but his addition in the last part of the problem is incorrect. Using the theories of Bruner and Bloom, we might devise a remedial program, breaking multiplication down into small pieces and providing lots of practice. We would achieve some success because for some students the cause of the problem is in multiplication. However, for other students, we might have to employ the theory of Piaget and determine if the child understands double digit addition. In short, I'm saying that many writing problems are not basically writing problems;

they are affected by seeing, listening, speaking, reading, and thinking. When we treat writing problems, we are treating a symptom, not a cause. How and why have I come to these conclusions?

During the summer of 1973, I continued to read and made some contacts at our area mental health center. After several meetings, the center agreed to send a group of eight trained psychologists, audiologists, optometrists, and speech therapists to ICC to screen approximately 125 students that fall. Their purpose was to determine what problems these remedial students were experiencing which would affect their reading and language development. The mental health center agreed to assist us in the testing for one year at no cost as long as we observed them, so that we could continue it in subsequent years. I could explain those findings for that fall, but I'd rather generalize about the data gained over the last six years, giving us a larger sample to draw from—approximately 250 students.

About 50% of the students suffered from some kind of visual problem. The most common one was the lack of binocular coordination, the failure to use both eyes together. In the worst cases, the sight is lost in one eye when it is not used; in less serious cases, the student employs only one eye when reading, resulting in headaches and eye strain.

About 5% of the students suffered from some kind of auditory acuity problem, caused by damage or disease of the ear. Although 5% does not appear very great, 3% is the national average. This includes many older people who naturally suffer from higher instances of auditory problems. Thus, the 5% figure we discovered is probably two or three times what should be expected in students at this age.

Approximately 60% of the students scored at least two years below their chronological age on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. This diagnostic instrument measures oral vocabulary, which is vital for both reading and writing. If the student has not heard a word, he has difficulty pronouncing it when he sees it, and he is not likely to use it in his writing.

We also administered a test of auditory perception, which evaluates how well a person's central nervous system handles information received auditorily. Auditory perception has nothing to do with hearing; a person with perfect acuity can suffer from a problem with auditory perception. The instrument we used is called the Token test, designed by two Italian physicians trying to assess the effects of strokes on human beings. Although my children—one in first grade and the other in second—passed this test perfectly, about forty percent of my students failed it. What does it matter if one suffers from an auditory perception problem? He is not likely to remember what he hears or to follow directions very well

unless they are repeated many times. The research says this problem should disappear by age 11 or 12 in the process of normal development, but we and others are finding many such problems in young adults.

Another area of concern is visual perception, which has nothing to do with sight. One can have perfect sight and still suffer from visual perceptual problems. In young children, the most common symptom is the reversing of words like "saw" for "was" or confusion between "b's" and "d's." According to the research, normal development of visual perception is complete somewhere near age 8, yet approximately 25% of my students, according to the psychologists, suffered from these problems. My guess is that poor proofreading is one of the most obvious symptoms in writing, and substitutions and omissions in oral reading. I also suspect that the student's inability to write specifically is directly tied to immature visual perception skills. For several years I have been wanting to perform some research to test this notion. If a student is unable to describe something very specifically, he may not see the detail which is needed for a specific paper. Our instruction, therefore, must focus on teaching him to see the details which he must place in papers to make them specific.

These bits and pieces of information are somewhat dated because I have now gone on to other issues needing study. As I was scanning the literature several years ago, I discovered no research to show that teaching formal grammar has any measurable effect on improved writing. There is, of course, no research showing grammar study has any ill-effects on writing, but my son's having to distinguish predicate nominatives from direct objects in seventh grade has about convinced me that the study of formal grammar can destroy a child's desire to learn to write. Anyway, the linguists tell us that we learn our grammar from having heard it. Therefore, if we are to improve on faulty grammar, maybe we have to teach it auditorily. To test the theory, my colleague and I began by putting three sentences on a sheet of paper before the student, like the following:

I talked to the boy.

I talks to the boy.

I talk to the boy.

Then, as the student is looking at the sentences, we pronounce one of them for him, and in turn the student indicates which sentence we have said. Obviously we are working on the problem of endings. We discovered that many of our students could not identify the sentence we had said because they did not hear the endings.

Later, we discovered that they don't sound the endings when they read aloud. However, the most encouraging part of our research is that we could improve our student's ability to identify the sentence which we said. The difference between pre- and post-test scores was statistically significant after four weeks of practice.

The latest area of our research has been with punctuation. As many of you know, punctuation rules are effective with some students, but ineffective with others. I theorized that students may never be able to use commas or periods correctly because they don't hear these marks of punctuation in speech and don't relate the printed symbol of a comma or period to the actual pause or stop in oral language. Therefore, we presented the students with paragraph-length passages devoid of punctuation and asked them to punctuate them properly using only commas or periods. The results were as expected; most students were unable to perform the task with 50% or fewer errors. Next, we gave the students the same passages, but had them read to the students, with the proper pauses indicating where the commas and periods should be inserted. The students performed slightly better, but they still seemed unable to detect where the punctuation should go when the passages were read to them.

So far I have talked about problems with remedial students, those who are not likely to be found in a typical transfer English course. During the last two years, however, I have begun research on students in our first semester transfer-level course, and some of my findings are astounding. In that class we teach the rhetorical types — comparison/contrast, cause/effect, process, and the like. As is the case with many teachers, we have always assumed our task is to teach the students how to write the various types. We do not teach the student how to classify; we teach him how to write the classification paper. We assume he already knows how to classify. Since a thorough explanation would be lengthy, I will oversimplify by saying that the research to date indicates my transfer students are unable to summarize, classify, or compare beyond the simplest level of abstraction.

For example, to test their ability to classify, I designed a set of blocks based on some created by Vygotsky at the University of Wisconsin. I gave each of my students a set and asked them to group the blocks in as many ways as possible. Although there are approximately 13 legitimate ways of doing so, the average score for about 50 students was 6 — out of a possible 13. When I gave them more abstract material to classify, their scores became lower and lower. I believe these results should stimulate some serious doubts in our minds. If writing a classification paper is the most

sophisticated form of classification, how can we expect to teach that skill if students aren't able to perform the relatively easy task of grouping blocks?

In summary, here is how my remedial students are "different":

1. 50% had visual problems.
2. 5% had auditory problems.
3. 60% had small oral vocabularies.
4. 40% had auditory perceptual problems.
5. 25% had visual perceptual difficulties.
6. Many of my remedial students were unable to read or to hear the proper endings on verbs.
7. Many of my remedial students were unable to hear the commas and periods in sentences read to them.
8. My average transfer student is able to decipher only 6 out of 13 possible ways to classify blocks.
9. Almost all of my transfer students were unable to summarize selected passages with reasonable accuracy and brevity.

In the teaching of writing, for too long we have been treating symptoms, not real causes. We have circled students' errors without finding out why they make them. We have been quick to evaluate, but slow to dig deeper into the problem of written language acquisition, a task we must begin in our classrooms.

Writing Apprehension: (I) Combating Fear of Failure

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There is a popular belief among teachers of basic writing that remedial students have negative attitudes toward writing—a fear of failure in writing that will cause them whenever possible to avoid situations requiring writing, or, when forced into such situations, to write as few words as possible. This popular belief comes from teaching experience and from reading the literature in the field. Recently, however, I've begun to question the validity of both the belief and the literature—not idly but as a result of findings I've discovered in studying my own basic writing students. In short, they haven't shown negative attitudes toward writing. That means there is something wrong with the stated premise, that basic writers have negative attitudes toward writing, or with my conclu-

sion, that my basic writers do not have negative attitudes. Assuredly, the minor premise is sound: my students with ACT-Verbal scores from five to sixteen definitely fit the category of basic writers. What I have done then is to lay open the literature for another look, consider the findings of my own two limited studies, and then explain the discrepancy by looking at what goes on in my basic writing classes.

Most of what has been written on attitudes of remedial students toward writing is very much like what we as basic writing teachers already know. Mina Shaughnessy, for example, in an oft-quoted passage describes the basic writing student and the causes of his apprehension:

By the time he reaches college, the BW student both resents and resists his vulnerability as a writer. He is aware that he leaves a trail of errors behind him when he writes. He can usually think of little else while he is writing. But he doesn't know what to do about it. Writing puts him on a line, and he doesn't want to be there. For every 300 words he writes, he is likely to use from ten to thirty forms that the academic reader regards as serious errors. Some writers, inhibited by their fear of error, produce but a few lines an hour or keep trying to begin, crossing out one try after another until the sentence is hopelessly tangled (*Errors and Expectations*; New York: Oxford, 1977, p. 7).

Shaughnessy's "fear of error" is described by Andrea Lunsford as the "fear of failure and the distrust of academia and of teachers, which may contribute to the small number of words Basic Writers produce" ("Aristotelian Rhetoric: Let's Get Back to the Classics," *Basic Writing*, 2 [1978], 5). Woodward and Phillips similarly describe their "Profile of the Poor Writer," who did not enjoy English in high school and does not enjoy writing now (*Research in the Teaching of English*, 1 [1967], 45-46).

Such descriptions are repeated in similar terms whenever basic writers are being characterized. There is a fear of error, a fear of failure that inhibits writing and impedes fluency. This anxiety is familiar in the field of speech communication. We've always called it "stage fright" and know that it makes speaking difficult. But Giffin and Gilham in a 1971 study tested the theory, hypothesizing that motivation to avoid failure is negatively correlated with self-confidence as a speaker. Their hypothesis was supported by the study, implying that anxiety is related to the desire to avoid failure ("Relationships Between Speech Anxiety and Motivation," *Speech Monographs*, 38 [1971], 70-73).

The investigation of anxiety in the area of composition has been led primarily by John A. Daly, who alone and with other research-

ers has conducted a number of empirical studies on writing anxiety, or *apprehension*, as he terms it. First devising a valid and reliable measuring instrument, he has shown that the highly apprehensive writer avoids writing whenever possible, reports a history of past failures in writing, and performs poorly on written message encoding and on tests of composition skills. Daly does not refer to the apprehensive individual as a basic writer, but his descriptions imply that the two constructs are characteristically the same. However, whether the anxiety creates the skills-deficient basic writer or the skills deficiency creates the anxiety is not clear, and Daly's non-directional study asserts only a correlation ("Writing Apprehension and Writing Competency," *Journal of Educational Research*, 72 [1978], 10-14).

Which comes first may never be clear, but the relationship, again, is not new to the basic writing teacher. What a review of the literature does show is that the basic writer makes frequent skills errors, is apprehensive about writing and fearful of failure, and does not like to write. Yet on two occasions I surveyed my basic writers and found them to have positive attitudes toward writing, to have little apprehension, and to claim enjoyment of writing. Both surveys were admittedly done on a small scale, lacking adequate controls in design, but my findings do call for further investigation.

In the first study, conducted at Illinois State University in the summer of 1978, an intact basic writing class completed an instrument made up of twenty-six items on a four-point scale, measuring attitude toward writing. On an adjusted scale of 1.00 as least favorable and 4.00 most favorable, the mean for thirteen students was 3.01. Furthermore, I found no significant attitude differences between better students, as determined by entrance exams, and the poorer students.

The second study was a comparative survey of attitudes toward writing as held by students in a regular freshman composition course ($n = 18$) and those in a basic writing course ($n = 12$). Completed in the spring of 1979, this study employed the writing apprehension instrument devised by Daly and Miller. Containing twenty-six items on a five-point Likert-type scale, the instrument was scored by subtracting negative scores from positive, then adding 78. The highest possible score, denoting least apprehension, is 130; the lowest is 26, indicating greatest apprehension. Daly and Miller reported a mean score of 79.28 ($sd = 18.86$) ("The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9 [1975], 246). Applying a t-test procedure to the data collected, I derived means

of 81.58 ($sd = 18.96$) for my basic writing students and 83.22 ($sd = 14.15$) for those in freshman composition. I found no significant difference between the two groups.

Neither did I find significant differences in several other areas I investigated. In addition to the writing apprehension survey, I used Hunt's revision passage commonly referred to as "Chicken" (Kellogg W. Hunt, "Early Blooming and Late Blooming Syntactic Structures," in *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging*, eds. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell; Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1977, p. 103). It's a paragraph made up of kernel sentences to be combined in any way that makes a more readable passage. I used this instrument for a measure of T-unit length and clause length as indicators of syntactic maturity, and for a count of errors. The advantage of the revision passage over original writing is that all individuals are working on the same writing problems, using the same subject matter. My intention in gathering data from the two classes was to determine whether, despite the small groups, there were any common descriptors that would separate the freshman comp students from the basic writers and thus merit further study. A significant descriptor might, with further testing for its validity, become a useful placement indicator.

But, as already reported, I found *no* difference in attitude. The basic writers' scores did range lower than those of the regular writers (47), but they also ranged higher (105). That is, some were more apprehensive than the freshman comp students, but some were less so. I had similar results with T-unit length and clause length. Comparing words per T-unit for the two groups, I derived means of 10.37 ($sd = 1.94$) for the basic writers and 11.47 ($sd = 1.59$) for the freshman comp class, which admittedly gives a substantial .05 significance and possibly indicates a trend, but I don't consider the difference strong enough for a placement descriptor. Further testing on this point is warranted. On words per clause, however, I found no significant differences between the two classes. The basic writers averaged 8.11 ($sd = 1.1$) and the comp class 8.50 ($sd = .94$).

But on error count, as expected, I found a clear descriptor of basic writers. Significant at the .001 level, the comparison showed basic writers averaging 6.67 ($sd = 6.62$) errors on the rewriting passage, while the freshman comp class averaged only 1.28 ($sd = 1.36$). Furthermore, the standard deviations on error count indicate a substantially greater spread with the basic writers, where the error range was from 0 to 17 as compared to 0 to 4 for the freshman comp students. Moreover, it can be observed that the

standard deviations on all the measures used in this study are greater for the basic writers, indicative of greater homogeneity of the freshman comp class and, possibly, of inaccurate placement in the remedial-level class of some of the basic writing students. My findings, in summary, supported the description of basic writers as error-prone, possibly suggested that their writings are syntactically less mature, and gave no support whatsoever to a characteristic anxiety about writing.

So I had a problem. Should I reject published findings of research on writing attitudes, together with the experienced observations of other writing teachers? Statistically speaking, on the basis of my small samples, I couldn't do that. Yet on these two separate survey occasions my students reflected a significantly positive attitude toward writing. One explanation I could offer was that the positive attitude was a result of the way I conduct my basic writing classes.

In the eight semesters I've taught basic writing at Illinois State University, I've developed a course that I believe to be effective. In a paper delivered at the CCCC Annual Meeting at Denver in 1978, I presented the course as I was teaching it then; since that time I've made only a few changes. The paper was entitled "Eliminating the Negatives in Basic Writing" (ERIC ED 159 734), and that phrase pretty well sums up my rationale for the course. I try in all ways to eliminate negatives. The course is graded on a credit/no-credit basis, so I avoid giving letter grades as much as possible. Instead, I require that a certain amount of work be completed by the end of the semester. Let me be more specific.

Teaching a functional-type grammar divided into six units, I expect that all units will be completed with an eighty-five percent mastery of each unit test. Students work on a unit until mastery is achieved. Secondly, I require that all weekly in-class compositions be completed and turned in, although not at any particular achievement level, because the writings are not graded; however, all revisions and corrections must also be made. If students request grades on these papers after mid-term, I provide them; otherwise I handle the writings without grades. Thirdly, I require basic students to keep a journal, writing on any topic of their choice. The journals also are not graded — neither are they corrected, unless the student requests that I do so. Rather, I comment on the content of the entry. As a consequence, the journals frequently become dialogues between me and the students, sometimes of the "Dear Abby" type and other times as love notes or other forms of apple-polishing flattery, but usually they're just conversational.

These three portions of my course — grammar, in-class compositions, and journals — I have treated in a cursory manner, because I feel they are familiar to most basic writing teachers. But the fourth part I would like to deal with in greater length, because it's a valuable teaching technique that I think every basic writing teacher should know about but often doesn't.

As a functional, student-favored, teacher-saving method of achieving error reduction and greater fluency, I use controlled composition. Originally a method for teaching English as a second language, controlled, or guided, composition has been practiced for many years. It can be seen as a type of sentence combining in that it requires many of the same procedures and transformations. However, controlled composition differs in that it is presented to the students in the form of short compositions with instructions for rewriting.

For example, the passage entitled "Just Like Me?" written in third-person plural requires a third singular rewrite. A portion is printed below.

Just Like Me?

"Will there be clones of me some day?" Many people are asking this question but are afraid to think about it. Clones are exact copies of another organism, produced without sexual function. Bacteria are good examples of this process.

Scientists have produced clones of animals. The scientists remove the nucleus from an animal cell and implant it into an egg cell whose nucleus has been removed. This egg cell then grows and divides and eventually becomes an exact copy of the animal. Clones have been made from tadpoles and from frogs. . . .

Controlled Composition Assignment: Rewrite the composition changing *clones* to a *clone* each time the word appears. You will also have to change other parts of the sentences to fit. Your first sentence will be:

"Will there be a clone of me some day?"

Anyone who has had experience teaching basic writers can see the possibilities. The assignment requires *s* endings, and pronoun changes, and the use of *a* or *an* — some of the very problems that trouble basic writers the most! And amazingly, without grammatical explanations of where to put *s*'s, and without a pronoun declension in front of them, basic writers will make most of the changes correctly. That's because they know the English language — not well enough to keep all the rules straight in doing grammar exer-

cises, but well enough to use much of it as the occasion demands.

And these compositions must be written to one hundred percent accuracy. All errors have to be corrected. If, for example, in the first sentence of "Just Like Me?" the student transcribed the question mark after the endquote, the error would be circled and the paper returned. This error could easily be identified by the student through a close look at the model. If, on the other hand, students didn't use *a* or *an* according to conventional usage, they would have a more difficult identification problem. But even so, they have probably encountered it before and will know what correction to make. If it is necessary, the teacher explains the usage, and here in the context of a composition the student has a chance to practice it. It may also be noted that from the teacher's perspective, controlled composition is an advantage in that it requires very little paper-reading time. Because the content is fixed and the location of likely errors predictable, a composition can be read in a minute or two.

How much transfer there is from controlled to original composition is not known, since there have been no empirical studies like those conducted with sentence combining. Teachers using the method, however, report improved writing (Gerald Dykstra and Christina Bratt Paulston, "Guided Composition," *English Language Teaching*, 21 [1967], 136-41; and Linda Ann Kunz and Robert R. Viscount, *Handbook for Write Me a Ream*; New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia Univ., 1973). Until improvement is quantified, such observations are certainly worthy of notice and consideration. It's not surprising that the technique works. Through the act of simply writing every day — moving the pen across the page in conventional usage — basic writing students are in part remediating their deficiency as they gain experience. Furthermore, through the practice of verbal and structural transformations of correct writing, these students deliberately tap their knowledge of conventional usage without having to remember the rules or devise something to say.

In addition, and most important in this discussion of writing attitudes, the imitation and manipulations of controlled composition decrease writing apprehension. Having been put down throughout their school years by error-ridden, red-inked papers, basic writers get a tremendous lift when they get back a composition with no other ink marks than a big zero — indicating *no errors*. Seeing their own progress, students begin to lose their fear of error, and the resulting positive attitude and confidence in their own ability lead to greater fluency.

Controlled composition is no panacea: it will *not* guarantee elimination of all errors; it will *not* make all basic writers enjoy writing; it will *not* produce fantastic leaps in syntactic maturity; it will *not* have your students writing A-quality essays by the end of the semester; it will *not* grant you freedom from grading papers. But it *will* go a long way in providing a bit of all these daydreams — better than anything else I know.

Writing Apprehension: (III) Where Does Fear of Writing Come From?

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The term "remedial writer" has appeared frequently in professional literature of late but so have references to the "basic writer," the "developmental writer," and the "terminal writer." The general tone of all these labels seems to be more negative than positive — we even reinforce this idea by sending students, like patients, to clinics and labs for diagnosis and treatment.

Characteristics of students who have these labels attached to them have been variously defined. For example, Mina Shaughnessy, whose fine work was made available through the publication of *Errors and Expectations* (Oxford University Press, 1977), suggested that remedial writing students can be recognized by the following:¹

- a. They produce a small amount of writing with a large percentage of errors — approximately 15-35 errors per 300 words.
- b. They make frequent errors in handling the so-called regular features of standard English, particularly past tense of regular verbs and plural inflections of nouns.
- c. They make numerous spelling errors that seem to exhibit no pattern.
- d. They express themselves in syntactic thickets so dense that even they end up not knowing what they were trying to say.
- e. They experience frequent problems with punctuation.
- f. They are restricted in their writing, but not their speaking, to a very narrow range of syntactical and rhetorical options; these, in turn, lead them to write rudimentary prose.

But merely having all these "mechanical" characteristics outlined for us does not provide a complete picture. We may, for example, find students labeled "remedial" who do not really deserve the label. We can infer from some students' performance and from discussions with them that they have never written much, in or out of school, that they often come from families or neighborhoods where more than one language is spoken, and that they have often sensed their problems but been unable or unwilling to do much about them.

No matter what definition we use, however, most of the evidence seems to suggest that their problems, mechanical or otherwise, are rooted in early experiences with writing, experiences that occur, in most cases, within the four walls of classrooms. Some of these experiences we may not be able to do much about; but through case studies and student autobiographies, we are beginning to identify situations where teachers have played major roles. Elizabeth Metzger, for example, in a case study of two college students and four secondary students from working class families who had been labeled failing writers discovered that none had received any consistent teaching of writing and that what instruction had been received favored mechanics and usage over other aspects of writing.²

It is little wonder, then, that many students when they reach college, or even before, view writing as both a mystery and an obstacle. Lack of consistency in our teaching of writing, and even the design of the curriculum often work to the disadvantage of the student writer. The traditional K-12 curriculum, for example, encourages activities with simple sentences and short paragraphs up to at least grade 10, and usually there is no consistent guidance for developing multi-graphed writing below grade 9. As a result, we have inadvertently condoned the non-teaching of extended writing until late in high school and at that point it may be too late for some students to catch-up, even if they wanted to — and many of them by that time have lost the desire to do so. Students' accounts of their early experiences with writing would seem to bear this out.

One of the first writing assignments I always request of students is an autobiographical account of how their present attitudes toward writing were shaped. The autobiography is not to be graded. It is, instead, an attempt to understand the perceptions of the students toward their writing experiences. I suggest that they might consider the following questions in coming to terms with the subject:

- a. What do you recall as being your first experience with writing? How did you feel about it? Why?
- b. What specific experiences, events, or people do you believe have affected your learning to write since you entered school? Why were these significant?
- c. What do you see as being your strengths and weaknesses, if any, as a writer at the present time? How do you feel about them?
- d. What do you think would be the greatest help to you in overcoming any writing problems you may have?
- e. How important do you think writing is to your future, in school and out?

Students do not address all of these questions at once, of course, but as might be expected, reading the responses, is fascinating. Through them a teacher can gain a better understanding of students' background and their beliefs about writing. These accounts also help immeasurably in tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Here are excerpts from some of these accounts:

Those awful red marks all over my essays, book report or term paper never seemed to end. In fact, my writing has always left plenty of room for criticism. I would sit hours writing, proofreading and checking spelling before passing my work in only to get it back all marked up. I never have been excited about writing, I think mainly because I never had a teacher willing to sit down and really teach the art of writing.

I found in grade school that as long as you participated in class, you didn't have to do any homework at all. I flunked a lot of classes that way, but I would always pass at the end of the year. I would just flatout refuse to do any homework. So often I can remember my teacher saying, And this paper will be due no later than Friday, or else. Friday would roll around and I would hear, Peter, where is your homework? Up until about the ninth grade I said something like I left it home or anything else that came to mind. Then about the ninth grade I simply said I didn't do it. When asked why, I said I didn't want to. That always ended it. In English class, as long as I actively participated in class, I still got a passing grade.

Penmanship was important at this school and I was terrible at it. The nuns awarded excellence in penmanship with a variety of impressive religious stamps placed on the papers. Size, and quantity let the student know exactly what she thought of your work. I was happy with a small stamp of baby Jesus but the other kids not only got baby Jesus but Mary, Joseph, the three kings and the whole manger as well. Being totally out-classed and getting no satisfaction from it, I quit trying.

One final account seems to summarize the experience of many:

My Writing Career

The first paper I ever wrote was a four page report on Thomas Jefferson. I received a very good grade on the paper. That was when I was in the fourth grade. I really liked it at first then in the fifth grade I had a bad teacher. She made the whole class write out of a handwriting book just to improve our penmanship. As you can see she did not do too well. I wrote another paper in the sixth grade, it was on the "Swiss Family Robinson." I received a "C" on that report.

When I went into junior high, I felt pretty good about my writing ability. I was told all through grade school, "You will have to write a lot in junior high school." Well, in my first year of junior high, seventh grade, I didn't write one paper either. I started wondering when I would ever write one.

When I left junior high for high school, my teacher told me you better watch out you will be writing a lot of papers. I entered my freshman year thinking I guess I am going to finally get to write a paper. I didn't write one then, in fact, I didn't write one all thru high school.

When I came to _____ I dreaded English 101. My first semester the fall of '77 I failed. In the spring semester I tried to take 101 and 100 at the same time. I ended up dropping 101 and passing 100. This semester I am going to try again. I have become very disillusioned with writing.

The tone of resignation and, in some cases, cynicism and anger that emerges from such accounts should be a definite signal to the teacher who wants to work with students in improving their writing skills. In many cases, a student may be "remedial" only because an appropriate approach was not worked out in which the student felt comfortable and where he or she perceived some meaning to the writing tasks assigned. In far too many classrooms, the student's particular "mind-set" about writing is overlooked. In a study of writing apprehension, for example, John Daly has discovered the following:

Writing apprehension reflects the individual's general predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably toward situations where writing is required. Individuals with high writing apprehension encode messages differing in diversity, length, quality and language intensity. In addition, high apprehensives perform poorly on standardized tests of writing competency. They are unlikely to enroll in advanced composition courses, expect to do poorly in basic writing courses, and report significantly less success in coursework which required writing. Furthermore, they are regarded by teachers as less likely to experience success in future academic work...

Thrown into a class with others who seemingly need remediation, student writers often see their predicament as reinforcement of something they knew a long time ago — they can't write. In a few cases, the student may solve the dilemma himself, as in the following account:

By not trying to learn anything, I missed out on a great number of valuable opportunities. One instance in particular stands out in my mind. Toward the end of one year, the teacher assigned a term paper to be due in five weeks. As with most other assignments that year, I kept putting off working on the paper. I could have avoided problems by getting directions from a personal conference with Mrs. W, but my ambitions as far as school were almost nil.... I failed the paper and narrowly missed failing the class.

Finally, after a change to a new school, and at the persistent recommendation of my parents, I saw "the light" and my study habits underwent a radical change. By some form of beginner's luck I was appointed editor of one of the largest high school newspapers in Louisville, the *Crimson Record*. Skills unexercised for years swelled like a dry sponge in water. Composition became a daily practice and I learned more and more every day.

Not all students are so lucky. Some students do not realize just how much their experiences with writing and their attitudes toward it have influenced their job outlooks and even their academic aspirations. When they do, they are not too charitable in their views toward their classroom experiences. Here's what one adult has to say when reflecting upon his past schooling:

My first high school English teacher required no theme papers and very little writing at all. My second high school teacher wasn't very good. He showed me very little about how to write a theme paper or other types of writing. My teacher told me to just go to the library and copy my theme paper out of a book. My third high school English teacher wasn't much better. He had me write only one theme paper of one hundred words. This teacher was much like the others I had because he showed me very little about writing a theme paper or writing in general. My fourth English teacher in high school wasn't a big help to me either. I wrote one theme paper of two hundred fifty words copied straight from a book and about ten book reports.

I had twelve years of schooling and I couldn't have written an acceptable theme paper if I had wanted to.

This student had no intention of going on to college after high school. He took a job in a coal mine until an injury forced him to consider some kind of re-training. His realization about what he had missed came abruptly: "When I started college everyone expected me to be able to write research papers, book reports, and

other types of writing. I couldn't have written these papers or any other type of writing." Students such as this one frequently make up the population of college remedial writing classes, and they tend to reinforce the notion that some college instructors have about the public schools not doing their jobs. Such a view is, of course, unfair but there is no question that we as teachers of writing need to take a much longer and harder look at the experiences and the attitudes of the students we are attempting to teach if we want to make real progress with them. Nowhere is this more important than with the remedial writer.

Reading teachers would never think of embarking upon a program of instruction without first determining where the student is, not only in terms of reading skills but also in terms of interests and needs. Writing teachers should do the same. But in addition to the usual tests of mechanics and usage and writing samples, built into any writing program should be ways of discovering what students' apprehensions are about writing. Without addressing these and arranging a writing environment in which they can be overcome, teachers will make little progress.

In addition to obtaining a writing autobiography from each student, which might then become the basis for follow-up conferences and even specific instructional sequences, the teacher may find the administering of a writing apprehension inventory to be useful. Several of these instruments have been developed, but one which has been used with considerable success is that devised by John Daly and M. D. Miller⁴ (see below). The instrument consists of 26 statements about writing to which the student responds on a variable scale. Scoring the results consists merely of using the following formula: $78 + \text{Positive Score} - \text{Negative Score}$; the lowest possible score is 26, the highest is 130. An apprehension profile of a class can be developed quickly, and so can individual profiles.

Students' perceptions about writing and their feelings toward it are substantial factors in how effective teaching writing can be. The remedial writer, particularly, deserves our help in these areas if we are to erase or at least diminish his or her problems.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Below are a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are uncertain, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with the statement. While

some of these statements may seem repetitious, take your time and try to be as honest as possible. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I avoid writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I have no fear of my writing being evaluated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I look forward to writing down my ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I like to write my ideas down. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I feel confident in my ability to clearly express my ideas in writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I like to have my friends read what I have written | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I'm nervous about writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. People seem to enjoy what I write. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I enjoy writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I never seem to be able to clearly write down my ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Writing is a lot of fun. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. When I hand in a composition I know I'm going to do poorly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. It's easy for me to write good compositions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. I don't think I write as well as most other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. I don't like my compositions to be evaluated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. I'm no good at writing. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

NOTES

¹"Basic Writing" in *Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays*, ed. Gary Tate (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 139.

²"Causes of Failure to Write: Exploratory Case Studies at Grade Seven, Grade Ten, and College Level." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1977.

³John A. Daly and Wayne Shamo, "Academic Decisions as a Function of Writing Apprehension," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 1978, 12, 120; see also John A. Daly and Wayne Shamo, "Writing Apprehension and Occupational Choice," *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1967, 14, 302-308.

⁴"The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 1975, 9, 242-248.

One Day in the Life of a Remedial Composition Teacher

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It's 8:20 on a sunny Monday morning and Mr. Phil Jones is in the lounge, preparing to face his first group of remedial composition students. Jones will teach six classes of so-called "basic" or "developmental" students before he goes home to his well-earned Scotch and soda at 3:30. Let's follow this dedicated teacher as he goes through his appointed rounds. Perhaps we can discover some answers to the question, "Now that you have been assigned a remedial composition class, *what can you do?*"

Jones' six classes are populated with high school seniors of varying writing abilities — from the "audio-visual" student who can hear and see perfectly well, but cannot read or write much of anything, to the more common "slow learner." If Jones' students seem quicker and more verbal in this article than they really are, that is because I have omitted most of their false starts, incorrect or irrelevant answers, and occasional silences. You may also notice that some of Jones' exercises and projects could work as well for students in upper-ability groups. But this should surprise no one since intelligent students can usually handle any class activity that is manageable by remedial students. Everyone can do drills, play intellectual games, and write lists of words. It is the content of these drills, games, and writing assignments which often makes them specifically "remedial." With these qualifications in mind, let

us join Jones as he gulps his coffee, grabs his lesson plans, and leaves the security of the teachers' lounge to start the day.

Over the weekend, Jones' first class of students has been studying an editorial which appeared in the school newspaper, urging school administrators to allow smoking in the corridors and classrooms. The class, most of whom smoke, felt that the editorial was weak. So Jones seized upon this teachable moment and asked them to read the essay carefully. Now he is ready to teach the notion of thesis and topic sentences to his class. First, he asks them to report on why they found the essay unconvincing — even when they were already willing to agree with its basic idea. What was that idea anyway? One student in the back of the room yawns and replies that he thinks the editor was trying to get school administrators to see students as adults. Quickly another student, a girl in the front row, pipes up: "No, the idea was to let students smoke in school." Jones accepts this version of the editorial's thesis and writes it on the board. He then asks his class to identify the points the writer made in support of this main idea. After a minute or two of talk, the topic sentences — or something like them — gradually appear on the board. "Now," says Jones, "underline the sentences containing these ideas in the essay." It happens that the editor of the school paper used only deductive paragraph structure, so the students are quickly able to see the pattern of thesis and topic sentences. Jones then shows the class that if the thesis and topic sentences are condensed into a paragraph, the main points of the editor's argument can be summarized.

"Now," says Jones, "since you all felt that this essay was not strong enough, I want you to think of some stronger arguments. In order to test your ideas, I'd like you to break into groups of two and write each other very quick, one-sentence notes about this issue." Since the students are familiar with this practice, they are quickly able to produce notes such as these (spelling unchanged):

Tony: We should not be able to smoke in school.

Cleo: But we're adults and should make our own desisions.

Tony: Yeah, but what about the younger ones who aren't adults yet?

Cleo: Well, maybe we should just let seniors smoke.

Tony: But the younger kids will still try to imitate them. How will you inforce this? Ask for I.D.'s?

Cleo: How about a senior lounge? Its better than the bathroom.

Tony: Yeah, and the litle kids wouldn't see us as much.

etc.

After each pair of students has developed a set of supporting ideas (in effect, topic sentences) and details, Jones makes the assignment for Tuesday: *Write a letter addressed to the school board* (the class had finished a unit on audience not so long ago) *arguing that students should or should not be allowed to smoke in school.* "Furthermore," says Jones, "the letter must contain at least three words from the vocabulary list for the week." This vocabulary list, by the way, contained words which the students had collected, as well as some taken from the previous week's episode of *M*A*S*H*.

The bell rings and Jones catches his breath before the next class enters and gradually finds their seats. This class is studying sentence construction and has recently explored the world of fragments and run-ons. Now Jones distributes a ditto'd paragraph written by one of the students. He asks the class to read the paragraph, carefully marking all fragments and run-ons. Since the students are restless and have little trouble finding many of these faulty sentences, Jones moves quickly to his next topic: the subject and verb as the core of the sentence's meaning. He reads a sentence from the sample paper — "It was the opportunity to fly which she wanted" — and asks the class to identify the subject and verb. A girl in a green dress supplies the correct answer. From here Jones can lead the students to the discovery that the words "it was" do not convey the main idea of the sentence. He then demonstrates how the more direct sentence, "She wanted the opportunity to fly," communicates the author's meaning more succinctly.

Having discussed with the class several similar kinds of convoluted and misdirected sentences, Jones prepares to drill his students on fragments, run-ons, and subject-verb selection. In the drill, he reads a sentence and then calls on a student to identify the problem or declare the sentence correct. Then, if the sentence is faulty, he asks another individual to improve it. After five minutes or so of this, he divides the class into two teams. (He keeps the same teams for several such "games" so that each group establishes a team spirit and a stronger sense of competition.) The students move their desks into two long lines. In College Bowl fashion, the two groups face each other. Jones has arranged the students in each line so that each pair of opponents is fairly matched in ability. He then "tosses up" a sentence for the first pair of opponents. The first student to identify correctly and remedy the sentence error, or to declare the sentence error-free, earns a point for his or her team. Then a new sentence is tossed up for the next pair of students.

This game has directed some of the students' abundant energy toward learning and worn them out a bit so that, five minutes before the bell rings, Jones can get their attention long enough to give the next day's assignment—to write a letter complaining about the discourteous service a customer received from a salesperson in a large department store. Jones has written out a paragraph or two describing the incident and putting the students in the customer's position. Using their knowledge of the methods for constructing strong sentences, the students are to write a letter to the store management about their treatment, urging that the salesperson be fired.

As the bell sounds, Jones runs for a cup of coffee before his third-hour class. These students have brought in comic strips which contain contractions. Before Jones collects the comics which he will use the next day, the students read some of their favorite ones and explain why they chose them. Jones then tells them about a comic he found in which *there* was spelled *their*. The students are confused, and he shows them quickly the difference between *there*, *their*, and *they're*. After a review of *to/too/two* and *its/it's*, the students are ready for a drill on such basic spelling errors. Jones has prepared a list of both humorous and realistic sentences which use these words, and the class works together to find the mistakes and correct them. In the list, they find statements like "They're ants in my pants" and "I am returning these boots I ordered by mail because their not only to tight, but two heavy, to." Through repeated examples, this review not only teaches the students the proper use of certain homonyms, but also prepares them for the lesson on contractions which they will have the following day.

For the past week or two, this class has been working in groups, trying to establish the guilt or innocence of a man accused of murdering a local barmaid. The trial has been running in the county court for two weeks, and the students have been following the evidence reported in the local paper. They have also talked with a lawyer (not connected with the case) whom Jones invited to class to explain legal issues pertinent to the trial. For the last twenty minutes of class, the students break into their groups in order to report any new evidence they have found. Each member of a group is investigating one aspect of the murder: the defendant's personality, the barmaid's history, the events on the night of the murder, etc. Since the final report is due in about a week, today the students read to one another rough outlines of what they are going to say. The other members of the group can then question the writer and make suggestions. During this activity, Jones

talks to three students who have been having severe problems with subject-verb agreement and checks over exercises he has asked them to do. The bell rings and he reminds his students to study their spelling for the test tomorrow, a test which will give them a paragraph filled with spelling and homonym errors.

Jones' fourth-hour class is about two weeks ahead of his second-hour group. They, too, are studying sentences but are now ready to discuss sentence logic and modification. Over the years, Jones has collected a number of student sentences like *My sister is moved away which is married is good cause I has her room now*. He passes out a sheet of these gems to his class and begins to look at several closely. "Is the first sentence correct?" he asks. The students, realizing that of course when a teacher asks this about a sentence it cannot be error-free, all respond, "No." "Fine," says Jones. "Then what's wrong with it?" Silence. "O.K.," he says, "Can you at least point to the part of the sentence which seems wrong?" Drawing on the students' intuition, he finally leads them to locate error in the phrases "which is married" and "is good." "What's wrong with the first of these phrases?" he asks. Silence.

"Well," he says, "Today I'm going to show you how to identify sentence errors like this one and fix them." He then outlines a four-step process which will locate several kinds of diction errors, indicate where certain punctuation is needed, and reveal faulty modification and awkward separation of main sentence elements. First, he reminds them to check for a subject and verb and to be sure that this core of the sentence *form* carries the core of the sentence *meaning*. The second step is to break the sentence into "units" — which Jones carefully does not define. He knows that intuitively most students can break down a sentence into phrases or clauses — although the terms *phrase* and *clause* mean nothing to them. He asks the students to do this for a well-constructed sentence which he has put on the board. They decide on this: */On his way downtown/Mr. O'Keefe saw/Billy/the boy who was injured/in the football game/last night./* Jones then points out how each of these "units" is connected to the unit which precedes it, so that "Billy" is "the boy," and the "game" was held "last night." It is easy, then, for the students to see that these groups of words must be moved about in the sentence as units and that the units must be attached to one another in a string so that the lines of modification are clear.

Returning to the student sentence, the class first unravels the diction and agreement problems which occur inside units (they can see the problems now that they are concentrating on smaller

groups of words). Then they straighten out the construction of the sentence as a whole. They discover that the writer's subject and verb do not convey the core of his idea, which is something like "I'm glad." Within each of the small units, they can also find subject-verb agreement errors. They reconstruct the sentence on this basis and, by moving "which is married" closer to "sister," are able to re-write the sentence as *I am glad that my sister which is married moved away because I have her room now*. The last step is for Jones to explain the distinction between "which" and "who," and then to add those two words to the week's vocabulary list.

After this exercise, the class divides into pairs in order to exchange rough drafts of the one-page papers they are currently writing. Each student evaluates the sentences in his partner's paper to see if (1) they are complete, (2) they have a strong subject and verb, and (3) they are properly constructed. The papers are eventually returned to their authors who will revise them, keeping in mind the comments made by their peer editors. The next day, Jones will collect both the final paper and the draft. He will be able, then, to correct both the editing and the writing of each student. In the last five minutes of the class period, the students take a vocabulary test based on vocabulary words which they have suggested to Jones during the week. The test presents the students with a paragraph containing several diction errors involving words from the vocabulary list, and asks them to correct the problems. For example, one sentence in the paragraph is *He is such a cold person, it is hard for me to sympathise to him*. Another is *He never tries to be hospital to anyone*.

After a quick lunch of what the cafeteria calls macaroni and cheese, Jones returns, refreshed, to teach his last two classes. The students in his fifth class have brought in some advertisements which they consider good, and others which they find less effective, or even offensive. One student has transcribed a Prestone Anti-Freeze commercial from television. Another brings in a glossy photo of a seductive woman standing next to an equally seductive car with a cougar on the roof. Another ad, from *Popular Mechanics*, explains in great detail the advantages of owning a particular tune-up kit. With this group of more advanced remedial students, Jones prepares to discuss the idea of audience. Together, he and the class determine the intended audience for several of the effective ads by looking at their language and place of publication. Then they turn to the less effective ads and discover that many of these do not please them because they were designed for an audi-

ence which does not include students of English 104 at Washington High.

When the students' answers about audience become mechanical, Jones turns to a chart drawn on the blackboard which outlines rhetorical situations. It has three columns: Subject, Audience, and Purpose. He asks the class for suggested topics and adds a few of his own, including *Sex*, *Drinking*, *How to fix a car*, and *English 104*. Then the students suggest various possible audiences: parents, teachers, boy friends, brothers and sisters, the local paper. Finally, in the third column, Jones lists the three most common purposes of non-fiction: to inform, to persuade, and to explain. Using different combinations of audience, subject, and purpose, he demonstrates the way in which audience and purpose affect a writer's language. "For example," he says, "suppose your subject was sex and you wanted to explain it to a brother or sister. You'd use one kind of language. Give us a sample of that, Elroy." Elroy, the class clown, supplies the appropriate kind of language. "Now," says Jones, "change your audience to your boy friend or girl friend." The class laughs and turns to Elroy, knowing he will not be able to pass up this situation. Elroy responds eloquently and is then told to adopt a new purpose — persuasion — while keeping the same audience and topic. More laughter. Pretty soon, the class is willing to role-play as Jones devises various combinations of topic, audience, and purpose. From this activity, he is able to make a smooth transition to the day's assignment: *Write two advertisements, one attracting students to a particular school activity (a football game, a meeting of Future Farmers, a Vo-tech bake sale), and the other attracting parents to the same activity.*

Each student in Jones' last class has selected a grammatical or mechanical error from his or her last writing assignment to explain to the class. Jones asks each student to write the sentence on the board. Then, he calls on them one at a time to describe the error and show how to correct it. A few students offer lucid explanations, using words like "subject" and "verb," while most speak more intuitively, talking about "who does the action" or "putting in a comment [comma] because there's a break in the sentence." Jones listens to them, noting what areas they still have trouble with, and interrupting their explanations only when they are blatantly wrong. In such cases, he usually interrupts with an example to disprove the student's homemade rule and so encourage him to revise it.

After this review, the class hears two in a series of student speeches. The first speaker, a boy in grease-stained blue jeans, de-

scribes to the class the seven steps in tuning the engine of an American car. He has brought pictures to illustrate his talk, and the other students question him when he is done. The second speaker is a small, quiet girl with glasses who has interviewed her neighbor, a personnel manager for J. C. Penney's, in order to find out what skills that person looks for in hiring general secretaries. She explains her findings to the class and recommends that the other students planning to do secretarial work take certain courses and find certain kinds of part-time work before they graduate. Again, the class questions her. Someone points out that she neglected to ask the personnel manager if grades in high school were important in evaluating job applicants. The students, several of whom plan secretarial careers, ask her to get this information. Jones collects the two written speeches, wishes his class a good afternoon, and goes home to his Scotch and aspirin.

No one would deny, I venture, that Mr. Phil Jones is a dedicated man. Although few of us are faced with his task of teaching six remedial classes, and few of us would teach six different lessons to those classes, perhaps observing his activities can give us some ideas for our own teaching and help us understand some of the ideas and practices on which he bases his work:

- 1) He never confuses slow learning with immaturity. His assignments, for example, call for more than a report of "What I Did Last Summer." Also, his "games" are fashioned after adult television shows like College Bowl.

- 2) He listens carefully to his students, learning how they perceive sentences so that he can explain the mysteries of grammar and punctuation using their vocabulary (whenever possible). He relies also on their intuition in describing sentence structure.

- 3) He offers his students assignments in which they can act as experts. For example, both he and the other members of the class can learn from the girl with glasses who wants to be a secretary. He lets them tell him their points of view whenever possible.

- 4) He draws class material from their own work and from materials they gather. He wants not only to teach them the vocabulary which the department says they must have, but also to help them understand words they come across in life outside school.

- 5) He has learned that there are no really good textbooks for remedial writers. Most textbooks assume too much about the reading ability of these students and how they perceive language. Too often, the texts contain circular definitions. And their examples are not similar enough to the kinds of sentences students really

write. As a result, he relies heavily on student papers and examples from real life in his teaching.

6) He has abandoned as much as possible the labels used in traditional grammar. He must, of course, talk about subjects and verbs, adjectives and adverbs, but beyond this, he uses simplified terms like "unit" for various phrases and clauses. He has even devised his own four-step system to describe sentence editing. He knows how important it is that, although he got the idea for this system from an inservice workshop, he has adapted it and made it his own. If he had adopted it wholesale, he probably would not have been as comfortable with it or as excited about it. His understanding of the system and his enthusiasm for its simplicity are at least partially communicated to his students.

7) He runs a disciplined course, but he does not forget to add humor whenever he can.

8) He plans two or three activities for each day so that the students are not bored with any one subject.

9) He relies heavily on group work in which students can serve as their own editors and in which peer pressure helps to keep every individual working. In this way, students can tackle longer assignments which they would never complete otherwise.

10) He does not avoid the use of drills, which are perhaps the best method for teaching students spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics.

11) His exercises and tests are often either humorous or related to the kind of writing students perceive themselves doing in the future. He often avoids using a list of sentences for a quiz and instead asks students to find errors within a paragraph, more closely simulating their revision of their own work.

12) He customarily teaches exposition, not "creative" writing, because he knows that exposition is no more difficult to master and will be much more useful to his students after they leave high school.

No single pedagogical system is going to make teaching remedial composition easy. No one hid a pot of gold at the end of this rainbow. Phil Jones has his tales of frustration and failure as well as his stories of success. But perhaps some of his more successful classroom activities will work for other teachers facing similar problems in their schools. That, at least, is a hopeful thought as we leave him, sipping his Scotch and soda, sitting in front of his favorite re-run of the Mary Tyler Moore Show, aching feet propped up in front of him.

Homework Helpers: An Alternative Approach

LEON GERSTEN
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Student A reports to Room 375, sits down and waits. Soon, Student B enters, takes his folder from the cabinet and sits next to Student A. In a short while, they are both engaged in a concrete assignment—a workbook, a sheet duplicated from a page of a book, or a chapter from a textbook. Student A, tutor, is there for the express purpose of assisting Student B, tutee, in reading or math skills.

The teacher-in-charge and his two paraprofessional assistants are in the room but are not directly involved in the students' activities. Rather, their purpose is to oversee the operation: sign up entrants, assign tutors, administer the paperwork, prepare tests, and generally to insure that the program works efficiently.

The after-school center is called Homework Helpers Program, a Federally supported Title I program that is innovative in its emphasis on peer help. The underlying principle is simple enough: young people learn from other young people. More accurately, academically non-achieving youngsters whose reading and math scores are sometimes three or four years below the average are helped by achieving youngsters who have mastered more than the basic competency requirements.

They work one-to-one. They stay together on a regular basis for as long as a semester. A diagnostic test is given initially to determine the math or reading grade-level equivalent. With that as a basis, the tutor plans a long-range program of readings and exercises designed to promote proficiency in any single area. For example, if a youngster is deficient in computational skills, he will be given a variety of exercises and drills challenging the use of addition or subtraction. The tutor is there for immediate feedback as to accuracy. Progress is determined by the extent to which the youngster completes satisfactorily the stages of work geared to his particular problem. When the tutor is uncertain how to proceed with further assignments, I am consulted for guidance and recommendations.

The attraction of such a program is that it is open to all students

who have learning disabilities. Further, the room used for the program is friendly and unstructured, so that applicants feel relaxed and accepted immediately. In addition to the formal pattern for reading and math improvement, we offer "now" help for any students who are having difficulty in a subject which does not require long-term remediation. For instance, if a student has trouble comprehending a physics assignment, he can enter for help as long as it is needed. Considering the complex structure of our total school program, involving almost 4,000 students, Homework Helpers offers a vital alternative to big-class instruction.

In classes of 35 to 40, many young people feel overlooked, lost, or left out. They get shunted aside by the demands of group instruction. In particular, it is these very youngsters we try to gather into our after-school program, so as to instill a feeling of self-importance and a sense of achievement. The difference is that we do not have a competitive atmosphere of learning; rather, we encourage instruction tailored to the individual's personal and academic needs. This advantage helps to single out our Homework Helper room as a place of significance in our school.

To broadcast our services to the entire school, we send circulars to all subject teachers, informing them of our hours, purpose, and intentions for the semester. We request the names of students who are failing or performing poorly. These recommendations become the basis of follow-up to determine the selections. Since we have limitations with regard to the number of boys and girls we can tutor at any given time, we try to make correct choices based on the following criteria: (1) three or more years reading retardation, (2) inability to do the most elementary computational tasks, (3) poor performance in class, usually resulting in excessive absenteeism, (4) negative self-image and low regard for the values of education, (5) explicit recommendation by a teacher, or teachers, clarifying the nature of dysfunction.

The students report on the average about twice a week for 40-minute sessions. Sometimes, carry-over is provided in the form of homework to be done at home or completed under the surveillance of the subject teacher. A log of tasks and performance is kept, filled out by the tutor after each session. The date, the hour, the subject area, the topic being studied, the specific work done are scrupulously recorded. This method enables us to see at a glance the improvement we hope for.

To assist the subject teacher, each tutor sends a post-lesson eval-

uation that indicates the work covered, so that the teacher may follow up in the classroom. In addition, behavioral patterns and attitudes are indicated. Much of what can not be seen in a classroom can be garnered from these evaluative slips. The advantage is clear: Teachers with thirty-five or forty in a room cannot have the luxury of assessing each student the way we can on a one-to-one basis. The cooperation of the teachers of these disadvantaged youngsters is as important as the usually shy, defeated boy or girl who enters our program.

Periodically, we administer Metropolitan reading tests and Nelson achievement tests to arrive at scores that will serve as a basis for continuance or non-continuance. Though the scores are not final, they do indicate the direction in which a student is going, and usually if remediation is upgraded a year or more, the student is allowed to leave. Those who do not improve as much are retained for a longer period of time.

In addition to learning skills, students learn how to study, how to gather information, how to use a dictionary, how to read for meaning, how to skim, how to make estimates. For many, education has been such a source of frustration and defeat that the most vital tools have never been gained. More important than the answer, we feel, is the ability to find *how* an answer can be obtained. Many of those who do return to their subject classes have mastered these operational procedures, which allow them to cope more effectively with the stresses of learning.

Scheduled tutor-training sessions sharpen our insights into the youngsters in our charge and provide the opportunity to ventilate problems that don't seem resolvable. For instance, one capable tutor confessed that one of her assigned students was sincere in his attempt to master the multiplication table willingly, but his attendance was so poor that continuity was affected. We discovered, by contacting the guidance counselor, a host of family concerns that were impairing this youngster's ability to function. We then called the mother, arranged an interview, and impressed upon her the need to allow her son time alone to concentrate on schoolwork. With her promise, the boy did appear more punctually and regularly.

The principal value of the training sessions is that the peer relationships of the tutors gives them a professional investment in the processes by which they operate. With minimal contributions by me, these very young but high-achieving students help one another to deal more effectively with approaches, techniques, and attitudes.

They gain tremendously from one another. My role, usually, is to recommend material that may clear out the avenues of instruction already agreed upon.

Once every few months, I attend district meetings with other Master Teachers to share the successes and failures of our operations. There, we share on a professional level what we have accomplished as well as what we have not yet attained.

In the two years I have supervised this Homework Helpers Program at my school, I can personally attest to the following gains for students: (1) improvement in reading and math skills, (2) increased interest in school in general, (3) better attendance record, (4) better performance on tests, (5) skillful application of coping techniques, (6) heightened sense of the value of self-application to school adjustment.

During this time, we have dealt largely with the peripheral category of "underachiever" — that type of student who can learn but who, for some reason or other, has given up and thus established a poor record of accomplishment. We have provided, I am certain, the wherewithal to return to the classroom with a renewed sense of importance and purpose. This purpose, we feel, is the groundwork of any success in a structured society like school.

Learning from a peer — another student who is knowledgeable and expert — is what Homework Helpers is all about. And, for many maladjusted youngsters, this way of learning can be more successful than by relating to most gifted teachers.

Tips on How to Get a Tutorial Program Started

1. Speak to your principal about the possibility of getting funds.
2. Consult administrators about logistical set-ups — location of room, availability, purchase of materials, storage places, etc.
3. Ask guidance personnel for the names of students who have not met minimal requirements in school.
4. Call these students individually to get a better picture of the problem.
5. Advertise the idea of peer help to staff, administration, parents, students.
6. Contact honor societies to hire prospective tutors.
7. Speak to individual teachers about ways to deal with seriously dysfunctional math and reading pupils.
8. Create an atmosphere of ease and good-will in your room, so that incoming students will sense the difference immediately.

9. Plan ahead. Work out goals for the program. Plan individually with each tutor.
10. Evaluate constantly and keep all involved parties abreast of progress.

Using Writing Errors As Diagnostic Tools

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George Orwell, in his often quoted essay, "The Politics of the English Language," declares that "it [defending good English] has nothing to do with correct grammar and syntax, which are of no importance as long as one makes one's meaning clear."¹ Orwell makes two claims here. He suggests that correct grammar and syntax are not important to good English and that making one's meaning clear is important. He seems to dismiss what is all too often the focus of teachers — error finding — and to champion what is all too infrequently their focus — clear communication.

We teachers may well protest that these two goals — correcting errors and communicating clearly — are not two opposing alternatives, but are related — that finding and correcting errors lead to clearer communication. As teachers we point out to students their mistakes so that they can amend them. What could be more intuitively reasonable? Nonetheless, such reasoning has its shortcomings.

There is some provocative evidence now that the process of finding, pointing to, and correcting errors does not always insure learning. Some of this evidence comes from the work of developmental psychologists. Developmental models are common in psychology and have been increasingly influential in education. James Britton's lead article for the 1977 NSSE Yearbook, *The Teaching of English* (The University of Chicago Press), argues forcibly that educators need to choose a psychology. He himself embraces one that includes a developmental view of growth.

We are already familiar with a developmental model if we know something of Freud's notion of psycho-sexual stages, Erik Erikson's eight stages of personality development, Kohlberg's six stages of moral development, Piaget's stages of cognitive development,

or the psycholinguists' description of language acquisition. All of these developmental models share certain ideas:

(1) All individuals pass through certain stages in their development.

(2) These stages are invariant in sequence; that is, they must occur in a given order.

(3) Development, in some cases, must occur during certain critical periods if it is to be optimal. The implication behind the notion of "critical periods" is that a person is biologically equipped at some periods of his life to learn specific tasks. A clear example of this readiness can be seen in the young child's ability to acquire language several times more efficiently than most adults — something that foreign language teachers have come to realize. This is not to say that a developmental task like language acquisition is ever finally finished, but only that its development is more arduous after the developmentally critical periods have passed.

(4) These developmental processes are automatic in one sense. They are not consciously initiated or monitored by individuals. They are tacit, non-conscious processes unless they are made explicit. Typically there have been three motives for making developmental processes explicit. They are the desire of psychologists to understand the nature of these processes, the desire of some parents and educators to speed up these processes, and the desire of psychiatrists to remedy the failures of patients to develop normally. The most outstanding example of this last motivation is Freud's description of psycho-sexual stages which came from his work with neurotic patients.

(5) Developmental stages are the constructs of individuals that represent their current "map" of themselves in the world around them. In normal development, this map changes as individuals find it inadequate to the world and their experience. Because many of these changes are keyed to common cognitive or biological changes, different individuals show a similar general pattern of altering "maps." Again, individuals are not aware of the distinctive or changing characteristics of their various maps — be they maps of moral terrain, language phenomena, personality or cognition — although, in the same way visual defects influence everything we see, these maps influence all thought and action. When we say that development occurs largely at a non-conscious level, we do not mean that the stages simply happen to individuals. The map-making process is not simply a matter of accumulating experi-

ences or amassing information. Instead, it involves the formation and testing of hypotheses.

(6) And, finally, errors are important, not in determining how capable or intelligent an individual is, but in showing us where he or she is along the developmental continuum. Errors systematically reflect the view individuals have of a given phenomenon.

The implications of this sort of psychological model for teachers are profound. It suggests that the child's basis for learning can be ascertained by the teachers' viewing various specific skills and competencies in terms of the child's stage of development. It discourages teachers from judging children with the developmental bias of adults; that is, with the expectation that children have already attained the developmental level of adults. It offers a picture of children, not as miniature adults lacking certain knowledge, but as individuals whose experiences have not yet caused them to construct views of themselves in the world broadly similar to the adult's.

But what does all this have to do with learning to write? Developmental psychology offers a basis for criticizing the way teachers frequently go about teaching writing. It alerts us to the possibility that writing, like other developmental processes, is largely tacit and that, therefore, the conscious attempt to teach writing through definition and description of such concepts as coherence, sentence transition, adequate paragraph development, vivid language and so forth will have a limited effect on most students' writing. So will marginal comments on students' papers which describe what went wrong — the lack of parallel construction, awkward wording, unclear pronoun reference: the list is long. Neither *a priori* descriptions of what makes for good writing nor *post factum* descriptions of bad writing can be of more than limited helpfulness because they are given from the point of view of those who already knew how to write. I do not suggest that those who know how to write cannot help those who are still learning. I suggest instead that the help must come from an appreciation for the immature writer's view of that enterprise.

Neither the preparatory descriptions nor the follow-up evaluations are apt to be heard if the child's notion of writing is at odds with the teacher's. It is no secret that hearing is not a physical phenomenon alone. An auditory signal of the proper amplitude is not always enough to convey the message. Consider the following incident reported by a psycholinguist in his study of language acquisition. A mother, bent on correcting her child's speech, got caught in this go-around:

Child: Nobody don't like me.

Mother: No, say, "Nobody likes me."

Child: Nobody don't like me.

(eight repetitions of the above)

Mother: Now listen carefully. Say, "Nobody likes me."

Child: Oh, nobody don't likes me.²

This amusing dialogue illustrates the child's inability to hear language that is at odds with his current, internalized hypotheses about language. It is clear that the child is still working out the rules for verb inflections and for negation. Until he forms new hypotheses that accurately predict English syntax, he will have a hard time hearing certain correct forms in the language around him. He will persist in acting in accord with his faulty hypotheses even when under direct pressure to change.

Similarly, our students may be unable to "hear" our marginal comments and other explicit advice about good writing because their own concepts of it are very different from ours and very firmly entrenched. An experience I had recently illustrates this point. A graduate student, who was having difficulty drafting letters to prospective employers, asked for some help. I made slow headway in suggesting alternate wording until I realized that this student was virtually paralyzed by a series of "rules" he had accumulated from previous English teachers. He thought that the same key words should not be used in more than two consecutive sentences. He thought that informal language should be avoided even though some of the letters were to contain rather personal communication directed toward individuals he knew. He thought that the personal pronoun "I" should not be used or should be used sparingly. It was as though these consciously-adhered-to rules were blocking less conscious editing efforts. Until I discovered these self-imposed strictures, I had a hard time addressing myself to the underlying difficulty.

Nonetheless, it is comparatively easy to work with someone who can articulate the rules and regulations that constrain his writing. Working with students who are unaware of them is more difficult. These immature writers do follow certain common rules, if we assume a developmental view of writing — rules common to other immature writers, but uncommon to skillful writers.

The developmental view of writing transforms our view of written errors. It causes us to see errors as developmentally significant rather than as random blunders to be swatted out one by one. Errors become valuable clues as to the sort of experience

teachers need to design for students. They are the means by which teachers can discover their students' present perspectives on language — their present language maps.

Preoccupation with errors in this sense is not normative as much as it is descriptive. This view of errors causes us to leave behind the simplistic dualisms of good-bad, right-wrong, correct-incorrect and to seek characteristic and significant patterns. Errors can be used to help teachers diagnose and acknowledge rather than to deny and exclude. Errors can be seen as reflecting differences, not deficiencies.

The most thoroughgoing application of developmental principles to student writing can be found in Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* (Oxford University Press, 1977). Although Shaughnessy does not put herself within a developmental framework, that is clearly where she belongs. With an appreciation for a developmental outlook on errors, she calls for "a fresh perspective on errors." She writes,

Adept as teachers may be at noting how far students fall short of a standard called "good writing" (even here there is wide disagreement), this is not the same as tracing the path that leads to such writing; we know errors carry messages but we can make only rough guesses about the importance and nature of these messages. (p. 120)

Here Shaughnessy asks us to try to figure out from the students' errors their developmental notions of things. We are to trace the path that has led to student writing. We are to read errors as messages that tell us something about what the student, rather than the teacher, is most ready to do.

And this Shaughnessy does most admirably. From her experience working with the Basic Writer (her euphemism for the college-age student who can't write at all) enrolled at New York University through the open admissions policy, she classifies and examines at length these students' writing errors. As she looks diagnostically at these errors, she discovers, for example, that it is probably inaccurate to speak generally of "spelling errors." What we classify and label as spelling errors may, in fact, have diverse causes. Some may be miswritten words and may reflect an inability to proofread. Some may be incorrectly inflected words. Some may indicate a vocabulary problem; that is, they may result from a confusion of an appropriate word with an inappropriate one. Some are true spelling problems. Given this array of possibilities, Shaughnessy recommends that students keep track of spelling errors on a chart like this one:

Table 1
SPELLING CHART (pp. 176-177)

Word	Misspelling	Letters or syllables involved	Type of misspelling
1. deceiving	deciving	ei/i	1
2. management	magement	na	9
3. buy	by	uy/y	5
4. easiest	easyest	i/y	6
5.			

Types of Misspellings			
1. Long vowel sound	7. Prefix		
2. Short vowel sound	8. Double consonant		
3. Final consonant or consonant cluster	9. Missing letter or syllable		
4. Diacritic e	10. Word confusion		
5. Homophone	11. Letter reversal		
6. Suffix	12.		
	13. [other]		

Such a chart allows a diagnosis of the nature of recurring patterns in spelling errors.

Shaughnessy's sleuthing among those pandemic punctuation errors is equally suggestive. She concludes that mal-punctuated strings of sentences, strung together with a series of comma splices or without any punctuation at all, may reflect the basic writer's awareness of the larger semantic unity that exists between sentences.

This sort of creative diagnosing of errors would not be rewarding if students showed individually anomalous developmental paths. They do not, however. They show, we are told, a common stock of errors arising from (1) interference from other languages or dialects, (2) problems of predictability within the system called formal English, and (3) difficulties associated with writing rather than with spoken English (p. 157). The patterns may be complex, but they are there to be discovered.

If we as teachers are to use errors diagnostically and to avoid merely retelling them when they occur on student papers, what responses to student papers are called for? The most effective responses are those that non-judgmentally report our experience with the written words. Students need to know how each part of their writing affects us and, for that matter, how it affects others. Instead of evaluating and characterizing, we need to report and describe.

Peter Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers* (Oxford University Press, 1973) recommends these direct and indirect ways of responding:

Table 11

HOW TO RESPOND TO STUDENT THEMES (pp. 85-91)

POINTING

1. Point to words or phrases which most successfully penetrate your skull.
2. Point to words or phrases which strike you as particularly weak or empty. (Pointing does not mean explaining why they are weak nor does it mean offering advice to strengthen perceived weakness.)

TELLING

1. Tell the writer everything that happened to you as you tried to read his words carefully.

SUMMARIZING

1. Tell quickly what you found to be the main points, main feelings, or centers of gravity.
2. Summarize into a single sentence.
3. Choose one word from the writing which best summarizes it.
4. Choose one word that isn't in the writing to summarize it.

SHOWING

1. Talk about the writing as though you were describing voices; e.g., shouting, whispering, speaking abstractly, etc.
 2. Talk about the writing as though you were talking about the weather; e.g., foggy, sunny, cold, clear, muggy, etc.
 3. Talk about the writing as though you were talking about clothing; terrain; colors; shapes; animals; vegetables; musical instruments; etc.
-

Teachers who commit themselves to methods of responding like these are employing some of the same strategies counselors influenced by Carl Rogers employ. They show by their response both an ability to listen and what Rogers calls an "unconditional positive regard." Rogers means by the term "unconditional positive regard" a non-judgmental stance that lets the clients (here, students) know that they are accepted. Elbow's pointing, summarizing, telling and showing all imply a measure of acceptance that merely marking errors does not. They demand of the reader a unique response, one which really reflects the writing.

This sort of response to student papers shows a tolerance for all developmental stages. This sort of response means much more than merely praising student work — although that is very important. It means giving students a lot of very specific response to writing. It means finding real audiences for students — other stu-

dents, parents, members of the school staff, the readership of various publications — so that students can benefit from their feedback. It means creating vivid rhetorical situations — situations which offer a clear purpose for writing, a definite audience and many anticipated responses. For us as teachers, it means retreating from a tendency to treat writing skills and errors in abstraction from the students' worlds.

NOTES

¹ George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," *The Collected Essays and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 4, eds., Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 138.

² David McNeille, *The Acquisition of Language: The Study of Developmental Psycholinguistics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 106-107.

Building on Intuitions: Encouraging Sentence Sense

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Although the outcry about student writing skills often begins with the criticism that "They can't even write a sentence," in my experience such criticism is unfounded. Students, especially those in developmental programs, often fail to punctuate sentences as grammatical units, and they do create syntactic structures that are not acceptable in standard English. But they do have the ability to write a sentence. And certainly to recognize one. Linguists tell us that each native speaker of the language, regardless of dialect, intuitively understands what constitutes a sentence. To build on that native "sentence sense," I begin a unit on sentences in a developmental class with the attached handout (see pp. 44-45).

The handout is valuable for several reasons. First, it helps students to see that they are not starting out from scratch, that there are some things about language they know, unconsciously, and on which they can rely when writing sentences. A second value of the handout, for classroom purposes, is that it raises a variety of compositional and linguistic issues. Why is "Cents had he in his jacket thirty-five," for example, not a standard sentence (as written; I inevitably have to caution students about that restric-

tion)? Why are "He goes there, too" and "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" sentences? Issues of word order, "making sense," semantics, pronoun referents arise. As does the issue of sentence length. Item #8, I tell the class, must be a sentence "because it's so long." Then I wait, hoping for someone to say, "But length doesn't necessarily make something a sentence." Thus we get into the issue of fragment versus sentence. We discuss how one might transform a fragment into a sentence, by examining items #11, 13, and 14. These few sentences and fragments raise a large number of issues. The handout has other values as well. Students seem to enjoy the activity and do not feel insulted by it. This technique has generated many lively classroom discussions, raised interesting questions, and aroused controversy. In short, it gets students to *think*, often an awesome task when dealing with sentence structure.

The sheet is not foolproof, to be sure. Items #11 and 12 tend to be confusing at times; in the future, I will probably discard them. Number 12 was intended to come from a sentence such as, "Janet, who is the girl, the brunette in the front row, made an A on the exam." (Such sentences do appear on student papers.) Also, item #8 gets into issues of parallelism and repetition, issues which are perhaps too sophisticated for a developmental class at an early stage in the term.

Pedagogical techniques come and go, but this handout as a way into discussing subjects and verbs, sentence structure, and punctuation has for me stood the test of time and of diverse class groups. I have used it with success in large state schools and small private ones, with predominantly minority classes and with heterogeneous classes of college freshmen. It helps confirm for me that intuitive knowledge of the language which linguists call our attention to. And it is fun.

Let me know how it works for you.

Sample Handout

Directions: Mark S if the word group is a sentence; mark NS if it is not a sentence.

1. Snakes slither along the ground.
2. Lot apples cost a the.
3. He goes there, too.
4. Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.
5. Cents had he in his jacket thirty-five.
6. His aunt's house was near the store.
7. They yes don't.
8. Because the professor changed the syllabus mid-way through

the quarter, because I was going through an emotional crisis, and because the quarter gave insufficient time to master difficult material, especially for a student who had been on the semester system.

9. I wish I could go, too.
10. Jack walking down the street.
11. Who is the girl, the brunette in the front row.
12. Who is the girl?
13. Although he complains about his arthritis and lumbago.
14. The book stolen from the library last quarter, the one with the pornographic pictures.

When Remedial Writing Is Not Remedial Writing: Preparing the Specially Admitted Student for College-Level English

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When we speak of the specially admitted or the economically and academically disadvantaged student, the word *remedial* always seems to enter the discussion. Yet the specially admitted student often does not fit into the remedial category. Remedial students are generally those who were taught the material, did not learn it, and have to be taught again. They have been "prepared" once. In most instances, this is not the case with students who enter the Rhetoric Division of the Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) at the University of Illinois. We have found that most EOP students have little or no preparation. Therefore, we must plan a course of study for students who are — most of them — being introduced to the basic writing skills for the first time.

The EOP program is designed for those students who have historically been denied admission to postsecondary education. Like many regularly admitted students, participants in EOP receive financial support from federal loan and grants, Illinois State Scholarship Commission grants, and tuition waivers authorized by the University. However, like regularly admitted students, those who

are admitted to EOP also pay for their education through family contributions, summer and part-time employment, and loans. Supporting services for the program are provided by a combination of federal grants and University funds.

As stated in *Undergraduate Programs* (1977-79), the University is seeking to do the following things to provide opportunities for the specially admitted student:

- Provide educational opportunities to students who otherwise might not even be able to consider undertaking a college-level program.
- Increase the representation of underrepresented ethnic groups at the Urbana-Champaign campus.
- Develop educational practices and policies, both academic and administrative, which will assist and support such students and which may well benefit students generally.
- Provide for those students not in the EOP the vital cultural and social experience of meeting, living, and learning with and from students from a different culture.
- Provide and disseminate to other educational institutions and agencies information which will assist them in their efforts to address the needs of underrepresented students.

The EOP student's placement in rhetoric is based on his ACT score and a writing sample. This writing sample gives us a more precise evaluation of the student's writing ability than placement based only on the ACT score. The student is given the following instructions:

EOP Rhetoric Program

University of Illinois

PLACEMENT THEME EXAMINATION

Summer 1979

NOTE: This theme is to be expository — not narrative or descriptive.

PLEASE FOLLOW THESE DIRECTIONS CAREFULLY:

1. Print your full name and social security number on the front cover of the theme booklet, last name first.
2. Read both of the essay questions below before choosing to write on *one*.
 - a. Write an essay arguing against an aspect or procedure of your high school education that you consider obsolete or otherwise inadequate.
Examples: The Grading System
Required Courses
 - b. Write an essay on a major event or scientific breakthrough which has occurred during your lifetime and which you feel will have the greatest impact upon the course of history. Explain and justify your choice. (A detailed description of the event or breakthrough is not necessary.)
Examples: The Assassination of Martin Luther King
The War in Vietnam
The First Astronauts Landing on the Moon
The Mass Suicides at Jonestown
The Nuclear Accident at Three Mile Island

3. Limit this general subject to a single, specific thesis (main idea) that you can discuss adequately in two hours.
4. If a written plan is helpful to you, outline the theme, using the back of the front cover. (The outline is for your use and will not be considered in grading your paper.)
5. Write the theme. If you think you have time, you may write a rough draft; or you may write directly in the booklet and make corrections where necessary.
 - a. Be sure your theme is expository.
 - b. Avoid merely "discussing" a topic; develop a clear thesis (main idea).
 - c. Develop your essay with specific material: facts, examples, or illustrations.
 - d. Use standard English.
 - e. Take two full hours.
6. Proofread your paper carefully.
7. Turn in all material, including scratch paper.
8. This essay will be evaluated according to the following: organization and focus, sentence sense, grammar and appropriateness of usage, punctuation, and spelling.

Most of the students who place in EOP Rhetoric are non-majors. For them we provide the following Rhetoric 104/103 and EOP Rhetoric 105/103 sequence:

The Writing Laboratory (EOP Rhetoric 103, 104, 105)

EOP Rhetoric 103 is a one-hour tutorial course taught in conjunction with both Rhetoric 104 and 105 — 105 is the standard composition course. EOP 103 is designed to teach students how to revise papers, how to proofread, and how to improve skills in grammar and usage. The tutor's primary goal is to teach students how to improve their writing by teaching them why they have made mistakes in their papers and how to correct them.

EOP Rhetoric 104, Introduction to Composition, is a three-hour course which teaches the basic skills in writing. This course limits the grammar, usage, and rhetorical rules to those required to make the student proficient in writing formal college essays. Rhetoric 104 teaches certain primary skills — word choice, spelling, use of the dictionary, usage, grammar. We concentrate on idiomatic expression, "ed" verb ending, "s" verb ending, verb tense shift, pronoun reference, sentence sense (such as learning to avoid comma splices and dangling modifiers). The student is also taught certain rhetorical modes: process analysis, definition, description, causal analysis, and comparison/contrast.

EOP Rhetoric 105, Principles of Composition, is a four-hour freshman course which teaches various essay models and the research paper. As the student gains skills while writing different essay models, the instructor teaches him to retain those skills for

later use in other courses. EOP 105 emphasizes essays of analysis which have well-developed thesis statements, paragraphs, and conclusions. In essence, the student is taught to use the rhetorical modes he learned in Rhetoric 104 in argumentative/persuasive essays and the research paper. The student is taught to write logically, analytically, and succinctly.

As you can see from the above descriptions, we are teaching *formal* basic writing skills. We are often asked what really works for us in teaching them. Trial and error have shown us that there are three basic methods that help to improve the student's writing ability — analytical reading, sentence combining, and peer editing.

Because most of our students have reading deficiencies, we must teach basic reading skills in addition to teaching writing skills. In both 104 and 105, students are required to read and discuss as many readings (literary and popular — good and bad) as possible. We start out with a summary of the work and then move on to the following general questions based on certain rhetorical criteria:

- A. What kind of thesis and topic sentences lead to good organization? Do you find that in this essay?
- B. How is the body of the essay organized?
- C. Does the writer make use of the best introduction and conclusion for the subject discussed?
- D. What are the writer's methods of transition? Are they effective?
- E. Has the writer used clear, specific examples?
- F. Does the essay succeed? Is it complete? Does the writer reach his audience?

After discussing the material and the criteria involved, the student is then encouraged to apply them to his own work.

Sentence combining is a teaching method that helps to eliminate short, choppy sentence structure. In other words, the student's thinking ability expands as his sentences expand. This teaching method introduces students to a mature form of writing that does not necessarily require grammatical terminology right away. Sentence-combining exercises also allow the student to realize that he himself "knows" what good sentence structure is. It is interesting to note that my students often find that their own solutions for the exercises are better than mine.

I let my students work in groups so that they can verbalize their reasons for the sentences they have generated and see combinations from other students. I also use Strong's method of giving them a group of kernel sentences that can be organized into a para-

graph and later into a short essay. This seems to be a painless method of introducing paragraph and essay structure.

Peer editing, a teaching method that our students enjoy, allows them to evaluate the work of others. Once students are able to see specific strengths and weaknesses in the work of their peers, they can apply their new knowledge of critical judgment to their own writing. Here is our introduction to peer editing (written by Michael VandeBerg, one of our instructors):

Peer Editing

For those of you who have never done this before, I'll begin by saying that you're going to have the opportunity of making marks on a paper—rather than having your own work marked up. The purpose of peer editing is to point out weakness and strength in the paper you're examining, and to make helpful comments to the writer of the paper. By doing this, you will gain valuable practice that will allow you to do a better job in evaluating your own efforts.

A thorough evaluation of the paper you are editing calls for *three* readings, each one of which has a different purpose:

Reading 1: General Impressions

1. Interesting?
2. Understandable?
3. Is each assertion supported with examples or illustrations?

Reading 2: Mechanics and Grammar

1. Circle errors and put marginal notes on paper.
2. Check for run-ons, comma splices, and fragments.

Reading 3: Organization and Development

1. Does thesis sentence control the essay?
2. Does the writer seem to be employing a consistent (and pre-determined) organizational plan?
3. Is each paragraph well developed?

As you can see, such teaching methods encourage our EOP students to stand on their own "critical feet."

I hope that the information in this article will help you to help us prepare specially admitted students for college level English. I realize that yours is a difficult task, but I am sure that you will use those materials you find suitable.

REVIEW

Reprinted by permission from *FERN (Freshman English Resource Notes)*, 4 (Winter, 1979), p. 11.

Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Bibliography. Index. 311 pp. \$8.00.

Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* is a response to the prob-

lems faced by teachers of writing at the City University of New York in 1970, when the eighteen member colleges opened their doors to any city resident with a high school diploma. Some of these new, nontraditional students were capable writers, or could at least struggle through at the "C" level; the vast majority could produce only a tangled forest of error.

Teachers quickly found that these "basic writing" students were not helped by the usual teaching techniques. Their writing was hampered not only by the expected difficulties — dialect interference, ignorance of traditional grammar, lack of practice in writing — but also by a host of other weaknesses such as imperfect assimilation of syntactic patterns drawn from the news media or even from academic discourse; inability to generalize from data, which limits the development of ideas; and more generally, an inability to translate the patterns of oral speech into the conventions of written discourse. Shaughnessy's primary contribution is the identification of such difficulties and the classification of the types of errors caused by them.

If *Errors and Expectations* were merely a taxonomy of error, it would still be a valuable resource for teachers. Fortunately, it is much more than that. In her attempt to be precise about the problems encountered by basic writing students, Shaughnessy analyzes the cause, or "logic" of each type of error, then suggests ways to help a student shape his thinking at certain stages of the composing process so as to eliminate that kind of mistake. This effort to derive teaching methods and strategies from error analysis is the essential feature of Shaughnessy's approach to the teaching of writing, and it governs each of the book's major sections: Handwriting and Punctuation, Syntax, Common Errors (e.g., subject-verb agreement), Spelling, Vocabulary, Beyond the Sentence (problems with the development of ideas), and Expectations (the expectations of students and teachers regarding the improvement of writing skills).

But the real authority of this book — and the source of its usefulness for all teachers of writing — is that Shaughnessy does not try to provide the "Answer." Instead, she acknowledges the many variables involved in any teaching situation, and then, with admirable good sense and penetration, develops guidelines to help teachers devise their own curriculums.

Unfortunately, this outline of Shaughnessy's book can not describe the clarity of her prose, her exactness in determining the root causes of error, and especially, the insight and breadth of experience she brings to her discussion of students whose intelligence and linguistic sophistication are denied by their failure to manage the complexities of written speech. This summer, Edward Corbett told an audience that he considered *Errors and Expectations* the best book about composition teaching to be written in this century. Having profited immensely from this book, I find it hard not to agree.

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